Distance Education and Teaching Issues: 
Are Teacher Training and Compensation Keeping Up with Institutional Demands? 
by Gerald Dickinson, David Agnew, and Reita Gorman

Introduction

There is an maxim that asserts “The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has its limits.” Another which states, “Few maxims are true from every point of view.” Regrettably, as technology has improved and become more affordable institutions of post-secondary learning have raced along the electronic superhighway without considering their purpose from more than a single point of view. Distance learning serves many good purposes from the institution’s point of view. Through technology, students who live great distances from the institution can be served. Adult learners can enroll in college course work at convenient times and in more convenient locations. College and university administrators recognize that instructors can teach more students without increasing the need for additional staff. Full-Time-Enrollment increases with distance education, thus, providing schools with additional state income with little additional expense. The cost of equipment is a one-time expenditure, while additional teachers must be paid every semester. Because colleges and universities systems are in a win-win situation with distance education, the demand for more and more classes to be presented on-line, by video, and by Compressed Distance Instruction (CDI) increases every year (Major & Levenburg, 1997; Bowman, 1997; Kalke, Massey, McRoberts, & Strand, 1997).

Adult students are enrolling in classes in greater numbers every year (Andersen, 1998). Studies have shown that distance education provides effective learning experiences for students and that women, particularly, perform as well in distance learning classes as in traditional class settings (Russell, 1996; Schlosser & Anderson, 1994; Burnham & Seamos, 1987; Stubbs & Burnham, 1990). However, as Major and Levenburg (1997) note: “technology wizardry, by itself won’t produce desired learning outcomes. Creating and implementing successful learning systems — ones that actually enhance learning — requires a thoughtful blend of educational philosophies, new technology, and solid instructional design” (457). Schrum (1996) writes, “Creating lessons and courses for distance learning is not a trivial activity, and it is not merely a matter of applying distance learning technologies to a successful traditional classroom lesson” (p. 31).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, we sought to determine how teachers, currently using distance education methods for course delivery, viewed the strengths and weaknesses of the method and its approach to educational instruction. Secondly, this study sought to determine whether teachers felt they had been sufficiently trained in adjusting their curriculum and instructional design to meet the needs of the distance learner. This study also investigated what methods faculty members utilized in the delivery of their courses. Finally, the affects on work load and compensation were assessed to determine whether teaching loads are still being determined in the traditional way by this university.
Review of the Literature

Bowman (1997) notes that “colleges and universities originally saw TV as an easy way to reduce the costs of traditional education. As early as the 1950s, classes with large enrollments were frequently taught in more than one room using closed-circuit TV to transmit the lecture between rooms” (p. 395). Whether between rooms or across the state, universities often implement distance learning courses without performing any preliminary assessments from either students or teachers, because distance learning is cost effective (Major & Levenburg, 1997; Bowman, 1997; Kalke, Massey, McRoberts, & Strand, 1997). Koontz’s (1989) case study of nine institutions of higher education indicated that “None of the institutions investigated conducted an institutional needs assessment to determine credit telecourses needs of university, college or department. Neither was there an assessment made of the potential telecourse needs of the potential users, i.e., the students” (p. 2). Additionally, Koontz noted that “77%” of the institutions studied initialed courses that were “parallel to existing courses” (p. 2).

The teaching strategies often parallel existing methods as well. As Bowman (1997) observes:

One of the ironies of DL [Distance Learning] is that even as we are increasingly discovering that traditional classroom instruction is not an especially effective form of educational delivery, we continue to try to use distance technology to replicate the classroom environment so that we can make learning at a distance more like traditional learning on site. (p. 396)

The literature is replete with ways to design and construct effective distance learning courses (Miller & Powell, 1998; Honeyman & Miller, 1998; Zohoori, 1997; Bowman, 1997; Cyrs, Conway, Shonk, & Jones, 1997; Rossman & Rossman, 1995; Major & Levenburg, 1997; Price & Repman, 1995; Schafer, 1997; Tessmer & Wedman, 1990). Yet, all too often teachers are required to begin teaching distance learning classes with little more preparation than how to adjust the microphones and how to use the ELMO.

Studies have proved that most teachers adjust their teaching styles to fit the format of the DL classroom, but students also need to be trained in “how to use the distance technology” (Kalke, Massey, McRoberts, & Strand, 1997, p. 452). Students and teachers need to have “a better understanding of technical difficulties” which unpredictably confound instructional plans (Kalke, et al., 1997, p. 452). Harrison (1997) rightly distinguishes: “Technology is vital. It should not and will not vanish, but technology is useless without creative human beings who can utilize it for constructive purposes” (p. 429). It is interesting and vital to note that with the volumes of literature and research currently being produced about distance learning, little, if any, discussion mentioned teacher compensation or benefit issues. Although hundreds discussed the training and instructional design adjustments that were essential for a successful distance learning program, no mention was made concerning how teachers should be compensated for the additional demands on time and work load.

Procedure and Sample Population

A survey instrument was devised based on a review of the literature in the area of distance learning and discussions which occurred at Arkansas State University’s Distance Education Committee meetings, the instrument was presumed to have content validity. The
instrument consisted of two sections and fifty-four questions.

Section I assessed demographics of the faculty who had taught courses through the compressed video facility at Arkansas State University: rank, department, number of courses taught, type of courses, and time of courses (Tables 1-4).

Table 1
Survey Respondent Data: Academic Rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Assistant Professor</th>
<th>Associate Professor</th>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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Table 2
Survey Respondent Data: College or Department

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<tr>
<th>Agriculture</th>
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<th>Arts &amp; Sciences</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All departments at the university were surveyed.

Table 3
Survey Respondent Data: Number and Recency of Compressed Video Courses Taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Number in Last Academic Year</th>
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</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>44</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4
Survey Respondent Data: Time of Day Courses Are Taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
<th>Evening</th>
<th>Morning/Evening</th>
<th>Morning/Afternoon</th>
<th>Morning/Evening</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
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</table>

Section I also addressed university and departmental policies and procedures for distance learning and faculty perceptions of course strengths and weaknesses. The question of training and development opportunities for teaching distance learning was also examined.

Using a three-point Likert-type Scale (Less to More), Section II focused on teacher preparation, methods of instruction, student response, and academic rigor for teaching distance learning courses, with each category divided into a separate sub-section. In each sub-section, questions which assessed participants’ perceptions of how compressed/distance learning classes compared with traditional instruction were posed. The Student Response sub-section gathered information on student opportunities to engage in discussion and class activities and measured spontaneity of students at the distance and campus sites.

During March and April of 1998, a survey was distributed to 60 faculty at Arkansas State who had taught at least one course by compressed video to distance sites for the university. After the first mailing, and a follow-up reminder, a total of 44 (73.33%) subjects had responded. Some adjunct faculty members who had taught by compressed video in the past were unavailable to respond to the survey.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics of faculty responses were summarized (Tables 1-4). Chi-square procedures explored differences in the frequency distributions of these variables. Means and standard deviation scores were calculated for each question of the Likert-type scale. Tests of significance (analysis of variance) were applied to determine the extent to which faculty members differed in their training, teaching methods, preparation, and perceptions.

Results

Strengths and Weaknesses of Distance Learning Courses

The faculty members (63.64%) surveyed indicated that “discussing” was the single most prevailing weakness that they encountered in meeting students’ needs in the distance learning classroom. Testing was selected as a weakness by 43.18%. Yet, only 20.45% of the faculty indicated that they alter tests or testing procedures for either on-campus or off-campus classes. Finding the time to give feedback and giving or getting questions was a concern of 36.36% and 34.09%, respectively, was a concern for some respondents.

Forty of the forty-four respondents (90.91%) indicated that more preparation time was needed for teaching compressed video courses than traditional courses. Thirty-three faculty members (75%) noted that the degree of difficulty for preparation for teaching compressed video courses was greater than for traditional courses. This is particularly significant because 75% of
the respondents carried the rank of assistant, associate, or full professor and as such, the assumption of extensive teaching experience can be made.

Faculty Development

Thirty-three of the forty-four (75%) of the respondents had no additional training or development opportunities relating to distance education other than the training session provided by the compressed Video Center. Of the 11 respondents who had received additional training, five were faculty members in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, three were from the College of Agriculture, two were from the College of Business, and one was from the College of Arts and Sciences. The five faculty members in the College of Nursing and Health Professions indicated that they had each attended “numerous” conferences and training sessions on distance learning.

Workload and Compensation

Thirty-nine of the forty-four (88.64%) respondents indicated they neither received extra compensation nor reduced workload for developing or teaching a compressed video course. Two of the five surveys that indicated additional pay were answered by an adjunct faculty members. One assistant professor indicated that the additional funds came from a grant, and one associate professor stated that he/she received additional compensation from one of the sites. One full professor did not specify whether he/she received additional compensation or release time or both, and was therefore classified as a non-response.

Discussion

Literature on faculty perceptions of distance learning remains sparse. Results of this study enable us to offer a case study comparison among a cross-section of one university’s faculty responses. However, because of the small scope of the study, the small population of faculty involved in distance learning, and chances for Type 1 error due to the number of analyses conducted, generalizations beyond the single university involved in this case study must be made cautiously. While we assumed that faculty rank was also indicative of teaching experience, we did not control for that or as for the number of years of faculty experience.

Henri and Kaye (1993) recognize that “teaching at a distance to a large number of people through the mass media has no possible comparison with traditional education” (p. 26). But, the findings of this study indicate that except for preparation time and teaching strategies, the overwhelming majority (73%) of the faculty surveyed maintained that distance learning course work met or exceeded the academic rigor expected in traditional classes. Further, over 84% of the faculty stated that the competence required for passing and making high grades in compressed video classes met or exceeded the competence levels required for traditional classes.

Distance education is popular today because it is believed to be more cost effective for the institution than traditional education (Rumble, 1993). Through one-time capital investments, more students can be enrolled in classes taught by one professional. Additionally, adjunct faculty members and part-time instructors can be hired on an “as needed” basis (Rumble, 1993). However, for Distance Education faculty to be effective, “they need time off for study and possibly research” in order to “acquire many of the skills of instructional designers and educational technologists” (Rumble, 1993, p. 99).
This study indicated that little or no release time is afforded permanent staff members who teach by compressed video. Furthermore, most faculty (75%) had received no additional training other than an initial introductory walk-through with the staff of the Compressed Video Center, and, at least at Arkansas State University, no further professional development opportunities are offered. None of the faculty surveyed indicated that they had any professional development in designing course work that would be more compatible with distance education.

Finally, while only full-time faculty members indicated receiving additional compensation or release time from the employing institution, the results indicated that over 90% of those surveyed spend more time preparing for classes in an effort to maintain the academic rigor of traditional course work. These results support previous studies which record that “it takes . . . from 2 to 10 hours to prepare a one-hour lecture, it will take from 3 to 10 hours to prepare one hour of tutored video instruction (TVI), 50 to 100 hours to prepare a teaching text which will occupy a student for one hour” (Rumble, 1993, p. 97).

Recommendations

These findings suggest the need for more training for faculty members who are expected to teach distance learning classes. Because of the time requirements for preparation of classes and the inability to use many of the teaching strategies perfected in the traditional classroom, opportunities to learn and develop more effective delivery strategies should be afforded permanent faculty members (Jenkins, 1993). While the economics of distance education has been embraced by many university administrators, longitudinal studies need to be done to determine the long-term consequences involved with the increasing demands on tenured faculty members. The research data has proved that faculty must spend substantially more time adapting content and delivery methods for distance cites. In addition, they are expected to teach three to five times the numbers of students in one course assignment than previously enrolled in their traditional classrooms and they must maintain a rigorous level of research and service to pass tenure review boards. As Rumble (1993) notes, tenured faculty members, “unlike temporary staff, . . . are not always looking towards the next job, but bad appointments may become a long-term liability, particularly in systems where there is tenure” (p. 97).

Exploring the effects of high-volume teaching assignments on research and teaching effectiveness would be informative. If economic issues continue to drive institutions of higher education, potential difficulties need to be seriously researched, anticipated, and countered. Investing in faculty training, staff development, and a strong faculty support staff appear to be necessary expectations to help offset the increased demands on tenured professionals in order to decrease the amount of preparation time required and to increase mutual understanding of faculty and institutional educational objectives. While the literature supports the idea that faculty members will learn to be effective technicians over time, assistance in shortening the personal expenditure of time, frustration, and decreased research productivity would provide long-term returns for the university, its faculty, and student satisfaction.

This study calls for further examination of the current training programs which have been effectively implemented by institutions of higher education nationwide. Part of the examination of training must include how training affects faculty and student satisfaction with distance education and how training impacts necessary preparation time. Finally, an investigations of how serving increasing numbers of students impacts the expectations of the faculty to conduct
research and service to help determine if tenure and retention criteria need to be reevaluated to reflect the increased demands of teaching distance education.

**Works Cited**


